DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 268 810 FL 015 637

AUTHOR Woodruff, Margaret S.
TITLE Comprehension and Communication, Fine; But What Do You Do about Grammar?
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 20p.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Behavioral Objectives; *Class Activities; Classroom Techniques; *Communicative Competence (Languages); *Form Classes (Languages); German; *Grammar; Higher Education; *Nonverbal Communication; Pattern Drills (Language); Secondary Education; Second Language Instruction; Student Participation
IDENTIFIERS *Total Physical Response

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses adaptation of the Total Physical Response technique, as used in a college German course, to the learning of grammar in high school second language courses. It is proposed that direct methods involving physical action can be used to teach and test production of almost any traditional grammar item and retain the motivational advantages of active contextual practice. Specific grammatical objectives and appropriate classroom techniques and activities are described for these areas of grammar: use of appropriate pronoun and verb forms to describe actions as they are performed, giving commands that can be acted out, shifting verb tense or voice to give a more precise description of an action being performed, negating sentences, using the appropriate case of objects of verbs and prepositions, producing possessive adjectives and pronouns, using the correct plural forms of familiar nouns, and changing word order when elements are deleted from or added to a sentence. A list of additional drills is appended. (MSE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.
"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Margaret Woodruff
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED268810

Comprehension and Communication, Fine; But What Do You Do About Grammar?

Margaret Woodruff, 1978

"How do you use physical response to teach grammar?" This question was frequently asked at workshops that I led for foreign language teachers in 1976. I had described an experimental German program that began with James J. Asher's *total physical response strategy* for developing aural comprehension and communication and Janet King Swaffar's techniques for developing reading comprehension. The program is currently in use at the University of Texas at Austin (U.T.).[1]

What kind of grammar did the teachers mean? Janet Swaffar, designer of the U.T. program, distinguishes between three kinds of grammar:

1. *Competence grammar* (as described by Noam Chomsky), an intuitive knowledge of a language system that, together with vocabulary recognition, makes comprehension possible; this type

---

[1]U.T. students begin their study of German by showing through physical response their comprehension of commands that the teacher has demonstrated. Students stay alert and are able to show comprehension before they feel ready to speak, thus giving the teacher constant feedback on their increase in foreign language competence without the use of English. They learn enough vocabulary and structure recognition for rapid reading of unedited texts for the main idea. Comprehension develops gradually into communicative ability, since students are encouraged by the stress on meaning rather than correct endings and word order. Materials for this two-year program are available from Janet K. Swaffar, Department of Germanic Languages, University of Texas at Austin.

FL015637

of grammar is not taught explicitly but develops through exposure to the language.

2. *Comprehension grammar*, which Swaffar teaches students so that they can consciously identify variations in morphology and syntax and their significance and, consequently, select the appropriate form from several alternatives. This grammar is intended to improve comprehension and to offer a first step toward production grammar.
3. *Traditional production grammar*, usually taught by drills and memorization of rules and paradigms, often without prefatory development of grammar #1 or grammar #2. This is apparently the grammar to which the teachers were referring.

Kenneth Chastain is one among many outstanding language-learning specialists who assert that competence (grammar #1) naturally precedes production and performance (grammar #3). He says that competence is best developed in a meaningful context, first by establishing competence through induction, as, for example, in direct methods involving physical response; and then by asking students to select appropriate responses (grammar #2) to show their developing competence.[2] Janet Swaffar and James Asher concentrate on the first two kinds of grammar for beginners. Asher points out that after students in his experimental classes understood the spoken language (grammar #1), it is "easy

---

[2] *Developing Second-Language Skills: Theory to Practice*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1976), pp. 342-344.

for them to focus their full attention on intensive practice designed to *fine tune* their speech to produce correct grammatical forms"[3] (grammar #3).

The teachers at the workshops saw the advantages of the U.T. approach but they feared that supervisors, principals, and parents would not accept a teaching emphasis that delayed demands for production of correct verb endings and pronoun forms. They were concerned about how students would perform on the grammar or writing sections of placement and achievement tests, or how they would perform if they should transfer to another school that stressed production of correct forms. Most teachers, particularly in high schools, are apparently expected to teach beginners to perform correctly at a simple level, instead of helping them acquire the foundation for understanding a large range of increasingly complex utterances.

And the answer to the teachers' question? Through direct methods involving physical action, they can teach and test production of almost any traditional grammar item, for example: producing commands and statements to and about various people, in various tenses; transforming statements in the active voice to statements in the passive voice; negating positive sentences;

---

[3] In *Learning Another Language Through Actions* (1977), p. 31. In this guidebook, published by Sky Oaks Productions, 19544 Sky Oaks Way, Los Gatos, California 95030, Asher describes the *total physical response strategy* and presents results of his research into its effectiveness, along with lessons for teaching English as a second language.

using the appropriate case of objects of verbs and prepositions; using the appropriate possessive adjective and pronoun; using the correct plural for familiar nouns; and changing word order when elements are inserted into or deleted from a sentence.

Forced to develop a compromise solution to these problems myself when I began student teaching shortly after giving these workshops,[4] I was pleased to find that communication in contexts created by actions, by pointing, and by pantomiming can be as carefully structured and controlled as an audiolingual drill. Such structured communication drills keep the students awake and excited about learning a foreign language. Exercises designed for practicing aspects of inflection, conjugation, and syntax, aspects likely to be tested on standard placement and achievement exams, can be arranged so that at the same time the student is communicating something that is meaningful to him in the foreign language.

The solution retains the motivational advantages of the active contextual practice in the U.T. and Asher programs. The teacher has the satisfaction of knowing that students are not wearily practicing meaningless transformations but that they perceive language practice as a communication game. Everyone's sense of humor is activated, and this improves attention as well

---

[4]Mrs. Gisela Sterling, German teacher at Austin High School in Austin, Texas, helped design and also supervised experimentation with some of the exercises described here.

as motivation.

The principal difference between my high school classes and my U.T.-Austin classes was that students in the high school classes practiced with a goal of mastering inflection for quizzes. Although the same combination of command and response, or action and description, was used, the pressure for students to master one structure at least partially before going on to the next one made so much practice necessary that a smaller recognition vocabulary was acquired than in the U.T. classes.

In addition, there was more correction of minor errors not interfering with comprehension. If students are required to learn to produce correct endings in a short time, tactful correction of errors is desirable in material that has been stressed. Students usually enjoy correcting each other (and themselves) spontaneously.[5]

It seems only human that most students will make no effort to recall endings and spelling and word order rules unless these are being tested. In Asher's retention tests scores were higher when tests involved action.[6] For informal daily evaluation it

---

[5]Janet Swaffar suggests desirable ways of handling errors in "Imitation and Correction in Foreign Language Learning," co-authored with Freda M. Holley, *Modern Language Journal* 55,8 (December 1971): 494-498.

[6]"The Total Physical Response Approach to Second Language Learning," *Modern Language Journal* 53, 1 (January 1969): 3-17.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

is probably best to test students individually on one or two items, just as they have been taught them, with physical response. A compromise for major tests, where careful and objective evaluation is expected, is the description on a written fill-in test of a context for production, so that tests become more meaningful and a situation similar to the teaching situation is created.[7] For example, if students have practiced describing their responses to commands in the present tense, a test item might read: "The teacher tells you to go to the blackboard: *'Gehen Sie an die Tafel!'* You describe your actions as you go: '_____.'" The student would write in German: "I'm going to the blackboard" *("Ich gehe an die Tafel")*.

Wilga Rivers describes and encourages the use of various *direct* methods involving physical response for teaching grammar as well as for facilitating communication.[8] However, she mentions these as just a few of many recommended techniques. I am proposing that structured communication exercises and physical response that demonstrates comprehension should take up about 70% of class time in first-year programs with conventional goals.

---

[7]Chastain suggests two ways of doing this in *Developing Second-Language Skills*, pp. 152-153.

[8]Wilga M. Rivers, Kathleen Mitchell Dell'Orto and Vincent J. Dell'Orto, *A Practical Guide to the Teaching of German* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 15-21 and 113-114.

The other 30% and the homework assignments should include reading and writing practice, based as much as possible on information about German culture and on the vocabulary used in classroom interaction, but always in a coherent if brief context. Brief presentations of rules and paradigms, either inductive or deductive, should also be included.

The exercises described below are to be extended over long periods and taken as slowly as necessary for preventing student confusion. They are conducted almost entirely in the foreign language. After the student has listened to and shown his comprehension of any small block of new vocabulary or structures, usually by physical response to commands, students can begin practice in speaking with these structures and words. When structure or morphology rather than vocabulary is involved, it is important to choose a single new item to practice and work with it for a while before going on to the next item.

The range of verbs can be extended by asking the students to pantomime such actions as driving or sleeping, as well as having them do things that can actually be done in class. In order to use verbs that can be acted out or pantomimed, the vocabulary of the adopted textbook may have to be modified: some words may need to be either postponed or taught in the remaining 30% of class by other means and some easily demonstrable words may need to be added.

Sample exercises follow:

I. **OBJECTIVE:** Students use the appropriate pronoun and verb form to describe actions as they are being performed, and

give commands that can be acted out.

A. **COMMAND PRACTICE:** The teacher performs an action and describes it: "I'm going to the board." She gives the students in groups and individually the corresponding command: "Go to the board!" She says "Command me!" and they tell her to go to the board.

Note: For languages with more than one form of the word *you*, the teacher can explain the social distinctions between the forms. In German, for example, students can be asked to use the familiar form for other students (after a few weeks of the polite form, if they are no longer children) and the polite form for the teacher. For initial practice, polite and familiar forms can be used exclusively without regard for actual foreign-language usage; later, polite or familiar forms, whichever are not being used regularly, can be used one day a week or occasionally.

VARIATION: After students have practiced giving commands and acquired some vocabulary, the teacher can hold up an object and invite them to formulate a command by asking "What should I do with the _____?" "What should Mary do with the _____?" "What should Mary and John do with the _____?" Instead of supplying the object to be used in the command, she can say "Give Mary a command with *run*," and the student might say "Run to the blackboard."

VARIATION: To teach students to remember foreign-language phrases for longer periods it is best to review familiar commands in combination and ask the students to wait until the commands are finished before they begin responding. For example, "Pick up a pencil slowly, put it quickly behind your ear, and then shut your eyes."

B. **STATEMENT PRACTICE:** Descritions of actions in first,

second and third person, singular and plural, should be practiced: one new ending at a time, using familiar vocabulary.

The teacher can perform an action and describe what she is doing: "What am I doing? I'm giving Sally a book." Then she asks a student to do the same thing: "Give Sally a book!" and asks him "What are you doing?" It may be necessary to model the pattern ("I'm _____ing _____.") and remind students to use it occasionally, or even to write the pattern on the board. Giving commands and asking students what they are doing as they respond is a good way to insure that specific words are reviewed, but the teacher can also say "Do something!" and then ask "What are you doing?" It should be made clear to the students that when they choose actions to perform they will need to do something that they already have the vocabulary to describe, whether it is something simple that the teacher has often instructed them to do in earlier classes ("Go to the board!") or a novel and humorous variation combining old vocabulary, such as walking slowly to the table and sitting down quickly under it.

Later students can practice description, in second or third person, of actions performed by the teacher and other students. By responding to the teacher's questions, which give them the vocabulary they need, they may pattern their responses after the question. For example: Teacher--"Give

Sally a book. He's giving Sally a book. Is he giving Sally a book?" Student--"Yes, he's giving Sally a book." After three or four identical exchanges with different students, the teacher asks: "What is he doing?" and cues a student with "He...." The student answers, "He's giving Sally a book." After two or three times, students no longer need to be cued, but will automatically begin with "He...." After a week or so of practice with regular verbs, there is no need to avoid irregular verbs.

Note: These present-tense descriptions are obviously more important for languages in which a *simple* present tense without auxiliary ("He runs") is commonly used, than they are for English.

VARIATION: With high-frequency verbs whose stems change from one person to another, such as *to be*, a circle drill involving the entire class works well. Students can ask the classmate to their right and answer the classmate to their left in the following pattern, as everyone listens: "How old are you?"--"I'm sixteen years old." (Turns to neighbor.) "How old are you?"

VARIATION: Give a student a command, for example to touch his nose, and as he obeys it, say "You're touching your nose." Tell the student to ask another student while still doing it, "What am I doing?" Indicate to the other student that he should describe the action in the terms that you used: "You're touching your nose." Have several students answer the student's question as to what he is doing. When students are familiar with this routine, they can conduct

the drill themselves. The first student asks another student to continue the chain by giving someone a command: "Bob, give Jane a command." Jane then asks various students as she carries out Bob's command, "What am I doing?"

II. **OBJECTIVE:** Students shift tense or voice of a verb in order to give a more precise description of an action being performed.

A. **TENSE PRACTICE:** Using similar procedures to those for the present tense verb and imperative, the teacher or students give commands, then ask not only what a person is doing but also what he did (after he does it) and what he is going to do (before he does it). In order for students to perceive the tense distinctions, it is helpful to contrast the various tenses: "Bob, go to the door. Bob will go to the door." (Before Bob gets up.) "Bob is going to the door." (While Bob goes to the door.) "Bob went to the door." (After Bob arrives.)

B. **PASSIVE PRACTICE:** In order for students to learn to identify passive sentences consciously (comprehension grammar), students can be asked to respond "active" or "passive" to each sentence said and simultaneously acted out by the teacher or another student.

Note: In German the same auxiliary verb is used for the future and the passive, with a participle accompanying the passive and an infinitive accompanying the future use of the verb. In order to give students practice in the distinction, the teacher might say such sentences as "The ball will fall on the floor" and "The ball is being laid on the floor" ("*Der Ball wird auf den Fussboden fallen*"

and *"Der Ball wird auf den Fussboden gelegt"*), demonstrating the meaning by laying the ball on the floor or looking expectantly at the ball and having the students respond "future" or "passive."

To practice transforming a statement in the active voice to one in the passive voice: First teacher, then students, place an object somewhere and say "I'm putting the _____ on the _____," then "The _____ is being put/ was put/ will be put on the _____" (practicing only one tense and person at a time until all forms are familiar).

III. **OBJECTIVE:** Students negate sentences.

PRACTICE: Tell the students that the class will be playing a game called *Argue with Me*. When you point at something and say it is something it isn't, they should argue with you by saying "No, it isn't." If your statement is true, they should agree, "Yes, it is." Similarly, hop and say, "I'm hopping." They say "Yes, you are." or "No, you aren't." Then mix the two patterns. Then ask the students to say the complete sentences, such as "Yes, it is a _____"; "No, you're not _____ing." After students have mastered positive to negative transformation, try negative to positive (remind them that this is still arguing with you).

IV. **OBJECTIVE:** Students produce the accusative case of the masculine definite or indefinite article when the noun it precedes is a direct object. (This applies to German; obviously, indirect and prepositional objects or pronouns that change forms can be handled in similar ways.)

PRACTICE: Have students give commands to each other and carry them out. As they do this, write on the board those of the commands that include direct objects and underline the object. Do something; ask them what you are doing; have them write these sentences on the board, circle the subject, and underline the object. Have them make new sentences with the old objects as the subjects, and circle the subjects and underline the objects. Give them the rule (for German, the rule is that only masculine singular articles change form when the noun is the direct object), if they can't think of the rule themselves. Test their recognition of subject and object again by holding up or touching something while making a sentence, using it and having students call out "subject" or "object" in reference to the function of that thing in your sentence.

Then give each student an object or picture and have them stand or sit in a circle so that they can see each other's objects. Model for them: "That's a _____. I'm eating/drinking the _____." (Pantomime it.) (Or: "I see the _____.") Substituting the name of the noun he holds, each student in turn says the pair of sentences modeled by the teacher. Then each student in turn points at an object held by any of the other students and says, "I want the _____," upon which that student must bring it to him. This exercise can be treated as a competitive game, with the student who collects the most objects win-

ning.

V. **OBJECTIVE:** Students produce possessive adjectives without regard to endings.

PRACTICE: Present forms by pointing and saying, "This shirt belongs to me. It's my shirt." and so on with similar objects belonging to people in the room: "This shirt belongs to you/him/her; these shirts belong to us/them." Then ask students to show recognition by pointing: "Show me my(your/our) shirts." Then have each student say, about any object in the room for which he recalls the name, "This (shirt) belongs to (name of student). It's (his/her) (shirt)." Each possessive adjective should be practiced by all students in this format.

VARIATION: Positive, comparative, and superlative forms of such adjectives as *large* and *small* could be practiced in a similar fashion: "This book is small. Jim's book is smaller. Bill's book is the smallest." Then, "Show me a small book; a smaller book; the smallest book." Then students can take turns walking around the room and comparing sets of two or three objects.

VI. **OBJECTIVE:** Students use correct plural forms of familiar nouns.

PRACTICE: Say "Touch one (name of object) if I say its name in the singular and two or more if I say it in the plural." Then have students complete the sentences "That's a _____." when you touch one object and "Those are _____." when you touch two of them. They can make their own sen-

tences, touching first one and then more objects and saying first "This is a _____", followed by "These are _____."

VII. **OBJECTIVE:** Students change word order when elements are inserted into or deleted from a sentence.

PRACTICE: A group of students receives large cards, each with one word or punctuation mark on it. Words are designed so that they can be combined into one or more sentences. The students are told to make a particular sentence and hold their cards so that the rest of the class can see it. A student is asked to read the sentence. Then another student is asked to insert his word into the sentence. If necessary, the class directs the students (in the foreign language) into the correct position. For example: in German, if an adverb is inserted at the beginning of the sentence, the subject must be moved to a position following the verb. If a subordinating conjunction is put between two sentences in place of a coordinating conjunction, the inflected verb must be moved to the end of the clause. And if a modal auxiliary is inserted into a sentence, the inflected verb must move (as an infinitive) to the end of the sentence. By directing students to move with their words, the teacher demonstrates syntactical transformations graphically.

VARIATION: Substitue a verb or preposition for one in the original sentence and ask students to replace the original noun or pronoun with one that matches the verb or preposition.

VARIATION: Students make their own sentences; the rest of the class corrects word order, etc., where necessary.

These structured exercises for practicing specific language features in communicative context are intended only to stimulate the imagination of the teacher in working out the exercises he needs for his current objectives. Additional examples and ideas can be found in the teacher guidebooks by Asher and Rivers and in the work of Theodore B. Kalivoda and Caleb Gattegno.[9]

[9]For example, Kalivoda's "Multi-Sensory Exercises," a paper included in *Dimension: Languages '75* (Proceedings of the Eleventh Southern Conference on Language Teaching), pp. 84-93, and Gattegno's *The Common Sense of Teaching Foreign Languages* (New York: Educational Solutions, Inc., 1976).

DRILLS INVOLVING PROPS, ACTIONS OR PICTURES

1. To focus on the correct use of he/she/him/her in English and to review miscellaneous vocabulary and structures; these pronouns have been introduced; this is just practice. (Note: when I say repeat that means do it again, not oral mimicry of words.)

   Using a book or similar object teacher says:

   TAKE THE BOOK (handing it to a specific student)

   GIVE HIM THE BOOK (pointing to a male student)

   (to the new student) GIVE HER (pointing at a female student) THE BOOK (repeat several times with different students)

   Combination: TAKE THE BOOK FROM HER (pointing) AND GIVE IT TO HIM (pointing) (repeat several times with different students)

   I'M GIVING THE BOOK--YES OR NO? (comprehension check on statements involving giving and taking; sometimes you do what you say, sometimes not; later add TO HIM, TO HER)

   WHAT AM I DOING, GIVING OR TAKING? (repeat several times; students may give 1-word answers)

   WHAT AM I DOING? (repeat several times; students may give 1-word answers; now they are producing the words instead of showing recognition)

   TAKE THE BOOK; WHO IS TAKING, HE OR SHE?
   (you point; students give 1-word answers; repeat several times)

   GIVE ME THE BOOK; WHO IS GIVING, HE OR SHE?
   (again, you point as you say the words "he" and "she"; students give 1-word answers; repeat several times)

   (hand a student the book) TO WHOM AM I GIVING THE BOOK, TO HER (point) OR TO HIM (point)? (repeat several times)

   (take the book from a student) FROM WHOM AM I TAKING THE BOOK, FROM HER (point) OR FROM HIM (point)? (several times)

(if this has gone on for 5 minutes or more, you will need to insert a relaxation exercise here--try to stop before students get tired)

From now on do not point any more; students will show their recognition of the meaning of the words he/she/her/him and produce them. (Explain that they should use pronouns, not names, so they'll learn more.)

TAKE THE BOOK; WHO IS TAKING, HE OR SHE? FROM WHOM IS SHE TAKING THE BOOK, FROM HER OR FROM HIM? (repeat)

GIVE HIM THE BOOK, WHO IS GIVING, HE OR SHE? TO WHOM IS HE GIVING IT, TO HIM OR TO HER? (repeat)

TAKE THE BOOK; WHO IS TAKING THE BOOK? FROM WHOM IS HE TAKING IT? (repeat)

GIVE BOB THE BOOK; WHO IS GIVING THE BOOK? (Students are to answer with pronoun, not name of student) TO WHOM IS HE GIVING IT? (repeat)

(tell students) TELL ME WHAT TO DO WITH THE BOOK (they give you commands with take and give, him and her; stop occasionally in the middle of this and ask a he/she question: WHO'S TAKING THE BOOK?)

TELL ME WHAT TO DO WITH SOMETHING ELSE--FOR EXAMPLE, THE CHAIR (try to encourage imaginative and even silly commands at this point, and allow them to use other verbs in combination with taking and giving--give them a few examples: TAKE SALLY'S JACKET AND PUT IT IN STEVE'S BACKPACK AND GIVE HER STEVE'S SWEATER; GIVE HIM YOUR CHAIR AND SIT DOWN ON THE FLOOR)

Now another comprehension check on statements involving giving and taking and the pronouns he, him, her, she: I'M GIVING HIM A SWEATER, YES OR NO? TAKE HIS BALLPOINT PEN; SHE'S TAKING THE PEN, YES OR NO?

Now perform the actions above (giving and taking to and from male and female students) and see if any of the students can describe your actions, however imperfectly: WHAT AM I DOING?

2. Sequence of complexity of tasks with regard to a particular vocabulary area, parts of the body and "grooming" verbs (washing, brushing and combing hair, brushing teeth, polishing shoes, etc.)

a. Teach parts of body through commands
b. Teach "grooming" verbs through commands (also nouns: comb, brush, etc.)
c. Tell simple story about getting up in the morning and getting ready for school, acting it out as you go along and using as many of the parts of the body and "grooming" verbs and nouns as possible
d. Tell the story again and students pantomime it as a group as you go along
f. One student pantomimes it, as far as he can remember, and you describe his actions
g. Distribute a printed version of the story and have one student read it aloud for the entire group to act out
(h. Read the story aloud again yourself and let the class follow on their sheets)
i. One student pantomimes it and the class describes his actions, using the printed story as a reference
j. Students put away the printed story, one student pantomimes it, and the class describes his actions--they should be more fluent by now
k. Students give you commands to direct you through the sequence in the story--perhaps using printed version as reference
l. Students give another student commands to direct him through the sequence in the story--perhaps using printed version as reference

---

NOTES: Whenever students are producing the foreign language in this sort of exercise, accept any meaningful communication and don't correct minor errors; otherwise they may not be willing to try. Do correct sentences that don't communicate clearly, if students are at a sentence-making stage--or one-word descriptions that are incomprehensible, if they are at the one-word or phrase stage. In any case it is always acceptable to simply repeat what a student says in a louder voice, as an expanded version of the same statement, or as a more correct version of the same statement, though this is not necessary. The main point is that the student should not feel punished for his less-than-perfect utterance.